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Compost operation on hold until renovations done

BY CAROL COMEGNO • COURIER-POST STAFF • AUGUST 23, 2008

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MOUNT HOLLY — Burlington County shut down its compost operation this week at its Florence resource recovery complex to make \$3.8 million in improvements for the next several months.

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Mary Pat Robbie, director of the county department of resource [conservation](#), said municipal sewage treatment plants can continue to send sewage sludge solids to the county in the meantime.

Sludge is mixed with wood chips inside bins and decomposes through aging and aeration to create garden compost that is marketed to landscape companies and to soil manufacturers in New Jersey and surrounding states.

While the 10-year-old plant is closed for its first renovation into November, the [state Department](#) of Environmental Protection is allowing the county to dump sludge temporarily into the adjacent county landfill in Mansfield, Robbie said.

She said repairs to the structural steel and to the roof are needed because of moisture problems caused mainly by a fire suppression system that the state originally required the county to install.

Meanwhile, a new operator will take over the composting Sept. 15 at a cost savings to the county.

The county last week awarded a 10-year, \$10 million base contract to WeCare Organics of Jordan, N.Y.

Freeholder William Haines Jr. said that will save a projected \$7.4 million over that time period because the cost is much lower than what the present operator is charging.

The operator can sell all of the compost but must give the county 20 percent of the income generated from sales, according to the new contract.

Robbie said the new management contract price is less because the new contractor expects to be able to bring sludge in from other counties and make more compost to sell.

In a request-for-proposal process, WeCare's price was \$700,000 a year cheaper than the current



Photo provided

Burlington County shut down its compost operation this week at its Florence resource recovery complex.

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contractor, Synegro of Houston, Tex.

A third company also bid higher.

"The freeholders and the county's project review team that reviewed the proposals are confident that WeCare is capable of efficient operation of the co-composting facility and of compliance with environmental regulations," Haines said.

Jeff LeBlanc, WeCare's president, was formerly employed by the company that designed and built the plant and was instrumental in preparing it to begin operation in 1998.

Robbie said the base contract price of \$1 million a year will increase yearly at the inflation rate of the consumer price index.

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